NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5574 MARCH 3, 1978
FRED BROWN/DACCA

PAKISTAN ATMOSPHERICS

ANNCR:

PAKISTAN'S CHIEF MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR, GENERAL MOHAMMED ZIA UL HAQ, MOVED FIRMLY THIS WEEK TO BLOCK POTENTIAL POLITICAL UNREST. VOA'S SOUTH ASIA CORRESPONDENT FRED BROWN DISCUSSES THE BACKGROUND OF THE GENERAL'S ACTION.

VOICE:

ON TUESDAY, GENERAL ZIA ORDERED EIGHTY-NINE POLITICAL LEADERS, INCLUDING BEGIN NOSROD BHUTTO, WIFE OF DEPOSED PRIME MINISTER ZULFIKAR ALI BHUTTO, DISQUALIFIED FOR POLITICAL ACTIVITY UNTIL THEY ARE CLEARED OF CHARGES OF MISCONDUCT. ALL ARE TO BE TRIED BEFORE SPECIAL TRIBUNALS WHICH HAVE BEEN SET UP TO LOOK INTO VARIOUS ALLEGATIONS OF MISCONDUCT.

GENERAL ZIA FOLLOWED UP THIS STEP WEDNESDAY BY PLANTING A BAN ON ALL POLITICAL ACTIVITY UNTIL MARCH THIRTY FIRST. BOTH MOVES APPEARED TO BE DIRECTED MAINLY AT LEADERS OF MISTER BHUTTO'S PAKISTAN PEOPLES PARTY. THE SECOND ACTION BLOCKED A MEETING OF THE P.P.P. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE WHICH HAD BEEN SCHEDULED WEDNESDAY IN LAHORE. MISSUS BHUTTO WHO HAD BEEN ACTING CHAIRMAN OF THE P.P.P. SINCE HER HUSBAND'S ARREST ON A MURDER CHARGE, HAD CALLED THE MEETING TO ACT ON HER NOMINATION OF THE BHUTTO'S TWENTY FOUR YEAR OLD DAUGHTER AS THE PARTY'S NEW ACTING CHAIRMAN.

AS A FURTHER PRECAUTION AGAINST TROUBLE, THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT AGAIN PLACED MISSUS BHUTTO UNDER DETENTION FOR TEN DAYS...THE FIFTH TIME IT HAS DONE SO SINCE SHE STEPPED IN TO TRY TO FILL HER HUSBAND'S SHOES.

(OPT) PAKISTANI MILITARY AUTHORITIES SAID THE BAN ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY WAS AIMED AT PREVENTING POLITICIANS FROM TAKING ADVANTAGE OF RECENT OUTBREAKS OF VIOLENCE IN VARIOUS PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. AT LEAST SIX PEOPLE WERE KILLED RECENTLY IN RIOTING BETWEEN DIFFERENT MOSLEM RELIGIOUS SECTS IN KARACHI. THERE ALSO HAVE BEEN STRIKES AND DEMONSTRATIONS IN A NUMBER OF OTHER CITIES. (END OPT)

UP TO NOW SUPPORTERS OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO MOUNT A NATIONWIDE PROTEST CAMPAIGN IN HIS BEHALF. AN EFFORT TO SPARK NATIONWIDE DEMONSTRATIONS ON MISTER BHUTTO'S FIFTHIETH BIRTHDAY, FEBRUARY FIFTH, PROVED LARGELY UNSUCCESSFUL. HOWEVER THE LAHORE HIGH COURT IS NOW EXPECTED TO HAND DOWN HIS VERDICT IN THE MURDER TRIAL BEFORE THE END OF MARCH. AND PAKISTANI AUTHORITIES EVIDENTLY ARE NOT TAKING ANY CHANCES.

THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER IS ACCUSED OF CONSPIRING TO HAVE A POLITICAL OPPONENT ASSASSINATED THREE YEARS AGO. MANY OBSERVERS FEEL THAT GOVERNMENT ACTIONS AGAINST MR. BHUTTO HAVE BACKFIRED BADLY AND HAVE GIVEN HIM THE STATUS OF A MARTYR IN THE EYES OF MANY PAKISTANIS.

AS FOR GENERAL ZIA, HE STILL INSISTS HE WOULD LIKE NOTHING BETTER THAN TO TURN THE GOVERNMENT BACK TO CIVILIANS AND RETURN TO SOLDIERING. BUT MISTER BHUTTO'S POLITICAL OPPONENTS HAVE BEEN BADLY SPLIT EVER SINCE HIS DOWNFALL. AND SO FAR, NO SINGLE CANDIDATE HAS SHOWN HE HAS SUFFICIENT MASS APPEAL TO WIN A NATIONAL FOLLOWING.

JS/PY